

FOR RELEASE 10:30 A.M. 12/07/04

**CONTACT: Linda Brantley
617-626-6520**

IMPACT OF STATE BUDGET CUTS ON WOMEN OUTLINED IN MCSW REPORT

Demonstrating that state government is incredibly important in women's lives, The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women today released the report *Real Cuts – Real People – Real Pain, The Effects of the Fiscal Crisis on Women & Girls in Massachusetts*.

The report, prepared for the MCSW by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, shows that women and girls are the primary beneficiaries of many of the essential services that government provides.

“During the budget crisis that began in fiscal year 2002, the state implemented almost three billion dollars in budget cuts. This report examines the impact that those cuts have had on women and girls in the Commonwealth. State fiscal policy often appears to be a dry and distant topic, but a careful examination of the state budget over the past four years shows that there have been real cuts that are causing real pain to real people.”

The report examines the effects of changes in access to education and higher education, job training, child care, health care and other government services on the economic security and life opportunities of Massachusetts' women and girls. It shows what can happen for women when investments are made, and what happens when cuts occur.

Commission Chair Kathy Casavant explained, “The idea for this report emerged during the height of the state's fiscal crisis, when Commissioners worried about how women were being affected by budget cuts. The Commission felt that such an analysis would show that women are being disproportionately impacted by changes to the state budget. Today's release proves that the Commission's instincts were right on target.”

over-over-over

2-2-2-2 Impact of Budget Cuts on Women

Linda Brantley, executive director of the MCSW, stated, “This report identifies many instances in which the lives of women in Massachusetts could be improved. We believe it contains data of use to nearly every segment of society and that the results will contribute significantly to the public debate about future options.

“Our next steps include holding regional briefings with elected officials and constituents on the report to ensure that everyone in Massachusetts who has a use for this information, has knowledge of it and access to it. The Commission hopes that this report will give legislators, public policy makers, advocates, women’s organizations and others who deal with the constituencies outlined in the report, hard data and a tool they can use to improve the status of women in Massachusetts,” Brantley noted. “And, as the voice for women of the Commonwealth, we will continue to observe and track how policy is implemented.”

Compelling statistics include:

- In 2003, 68 % of the students graduating from state colleges were women, and 64% of community college graduates were women.
- Sixty-five percent of adults covered by Medicaid in Massachusetts are women.
- Women head more than 90 % of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Families with Dependent Children.
- Single mothers head 72% of families living below the federal poverty line in Massachusetts and thus housing subsidies, childcare and other supports provided to low-income families disproportionately help women.
- In 2004, 78% of the recipients of elder home care services in Massachusetts were women.

“Higher education is a means to secure economic self-sufficiency for women and men. Although higher education is not generally considered a “women’s issue,” the fact that women represent the majority of students in Massachusetts’ public colleges and universities makes it one.” Between fiscal years 2001 and 2004, total funding for higher education fell by \$200.6 million or 24 percent in real terms.

The report continues, “Comparing the earnings of men and women by education level shows two stark trends: men have higher earnings at each level of

over-over-over

3-3-3-3 Impact of Budget Cuts on Women

educational attainment; and earnings rise substantially for men and women as they receive additional education. From the perspective of being able to provide economic security for their families, the data in this report suggests that women may need the benefits of education even more than men. Women without a high school degree need to get a high school degree to have earnings that approach those of men without a high school degree. The same trend continues at each step of further education.”

The report concludes, “The cuts described in this report are causing real pain today, but they may lead to even greater damage in the years ahead. When preventive health care programs and investments in education and training are cut it often takes years for the damage to appear.

“As the Commonwealth’s fiscal and economic situation begins to stabilize, it is time to begin to ask whether the negative impacts of budget cuts on women and girls is something that should simply be accepted as inevitable, or whether new policies should be adopted in the years ahead to reverse the cuts that have caused real harm to women and girls across the Commonwealth.”

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is an independent state agency that was legislatively created in 1998 to advance women toward full equality in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women. The Commission exists to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Massachusetts. The Commission is bipartisan and comprised of 19 Commissioners who are appointed by one of four governing authorities: the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House and the Caucus of Women Legislators.

Part of the MCSW’s mission is to study and report on the status of women in Massachusetts. This is the first such report the Commission has released since its inception in 1998.

Copies of the report are available for download from the Commission’s website at www.mass.gov/women. Or, for more information, contact the MCSW at 617-626-6520 or email mcsw@state.ma.us.